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TAGS: [BE](#) [CR](#) [CY](#) [EUN](#) [PREL](#) [TK](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: EU AND US DISCUSS TURKEY, CROATIA AT COELA TROIKA
AND OTHER MEETINGS

REF: USEU BRUSSELS 1130

Classified By: Institutional Affairs Unit Chief Courtney Nemroff for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. EUR/SE Director Douglas Silliman and EUR/SCE Director Christopher Hoh met with counterparts in the European Council, Commission, and current and incoming presidencies to discuss EU candidate countries Turkey and Croatia at a regularly scheduled COELA troika March 21. EU interlocutors were positive about Turkey's steady progress in technical negotiations but expressed concern that discussions could become more difficult later in the year, particularly depending on actions the GOT might take to counter the PKK threat. The EU reported that Croatia is making relatively good progress in accession negotiations, but the Commission is still waiting for practical results from promising reform plans put forward by Zagreb. EU interlocutors highlighted judicial reform, anti-corruption, and human rights as issues of particular concern. Silliman and Hoh also held separate side meetings with EU and permrep counterparts on their respective portfolios; Hoh's private meetings are reported reftel. END SUMMARY.

Turkey

12. (SBU) The German MFA's Special Envoy for Southeastern Europe and Turkey Emily Haber opened the meeting by stressing that the EU's December Council decision regarding how the EU would proceed with Turkish accession negotiations was a good decision and an appropriate reaction to Ankara's non-implementation of the Ankara Additional Protocol. European Commission official Silliman their concerns that a GOT intervention in Iraq could have a "devastating" effect on member state perceptions of Turkey, as it would reinforce their argument that the accession of state that bordered on Iraq would be dangerous for European security. Senior Commission officials stressed that Turkish intervention in Iraq could have grave repercussions for the entire Turkish accession process.)

15. (SBU) In addition to the troika meeting, Silliman briefed 27 members of the COELA working group, the forum in which all 27 member states, the Council, and the Commission discuss enlargement issues. During his briefing, an official from the Dutch permanent representation noted his "shock" at statements by Turkish academics and others at a recent Wilton

Park conference where they referred to the EU's December Council decision on Turkey as the EU's "humiliation" of

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Turks. In response, Silliman noted the importance of reaching out to Turkish civil society and described USG efforts in this area, including our large student exchange program.

16. (C) Silliman met separately with Commission and friendly Permanent Representation officials, as well as with the German presidency and incoming Portuguese presidency. Commission contacts noted steady progress in screening and opening Turkey's acquis chapters, with four chapters possibly opening by the end of the German presidency (note: one of the four, the chapter on enterprise and industrial policy, was opened March 28.) They added that progress should continue during the upcoming Portuguese presidency.

17. (C) However, the Commission officials acknowledged the current sense of calm in negotiations would not last, especially when it came time to discuss more controversial political reforms in October or November 2007. They also noted they would need to take stock of progress on the Cyprus issue later this year. An official in Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn's cabinet noted Ali Babacan had been an active, regular visitor to Brussels and that his efforts were playing well in Brussels. She added that politically the EU wanted to renew cooperation with Turkey in the energy sector. The Commission was planning a high level conference in Istanbul on energy cooperation which Energy Commissioner Piebalgs and Rehn would likely attend, along with Turkish Foreign Minister Gul. German presidency officials noted they remained hopeful they could achieve "something" on direct trade with the Turkish Cypriots during their presidency, although not likely as much as they had hoped.

8.. (C) A UK Permanent Representation official stressed that the French election could play heavily into the dynamics of negotiations, noting the danger that Sarkozy, if elected, could be tempted to make a clear statement about Turkey at the June European Council meeting within the context of discussions over EU Constitutional reform and the future of the Constitutional treaty. Our UK contact noted it would be helpful for France to be able to show some "commercial wins" from the negotiation process, for example on issues such as the beef ban or IPR, to help get French buy in. Overall, our source said "we probably have 18 months" before the EU re-focuses its attention on Turkey's lack of implementation of the Ankara Additional Protocol, around the beginning of the French presidency, at which point Cyprus will start to make noises again. That, he said, would be a good time for Turkey to make more dramatic moves. He noted it might be useful for GOT officials to go to France, meet the new French President, and possibly announce some "France-friendly" concessions, possibly in the form of some sort of trade-off for Ankara given that the French will be assuming the presidency.

19. (C) Our UK contact assessed that the more difficult acquis chapters to open would be those that got into issues of normalization and international organizations. He indicated that Turkey would likely at a minimum need to cease blocking Cyprus in Waasenaar in order to gain more member state sympathy on some of these points. Regarding direct trade for the Turkish Cypriots, the UK expert was pessimistic about the presidency's chances for finding a successful formula, but pointed to the fact of having direct trade "on the table" could be useful for ensuring "good behavior" by the Greek Cypriots.

Croatia

18. (SBU) European Commission Deputy Head of Unit for Croatia Hendrik Bendixen briefed the troika on the status of

Croatia's accession negotiations and noted that the screening process will be finished by mid-April. Commission interlocutors reported that that Zagreb's institutional capacity for negotiations is good, but not deep, and the government has difficulty making some political decisions. Despite relatively good progress, Bendixen said that Croatia's 2009 accession target date is unrealistic, and while the government's plans for reform appear promising, the EU is waiting to see tangible results. The Commission has

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closed two chapters (Education and Culture and Science and Research) and plans to open more by the end of the year. Other chapters will likely remain unopened until 2008, pending Croatian ability to meet key benchmarks. At the top of the Commission's agenda are issues of judicial reform, anti-corruption, and human rights. EU negotiators are concerned about the backlog of court cases and the lack of transparency in financial crimes and corruption cases. Bendixen also noted Croatia's slow progress on refugee returns. He said that shortcomings in all of these areas were indicative of broader questions about the functioning of rule of law in Croatia. He added that Zagreb had put forward a promising plan for 2007, however, the EU side cautioned that reform may slow later this year with the approach of the November elections.

¶9. (SBU) Hoh noted that the U.S. viewed the accession process in a positive way and said that the U.S. shared EU concerns about the judicial system and refugee returns. Hoh observed that much of the corruption is a result of the Communist legacy; attention to economic reform will enhance prospects for growth. Washington is optimistic that the EU accession process will aid in this regard and the U.S. will be supportive. He said that while the U.S. and EU held differing views on closing the OSCE mission in Croatia, the potential closure will mean that the two sides will need to redouble cooperative efforts to ensure progress on refugee returns and minority rights. (Note: In a separate meeting, Commission Head of Unit for Croatia David Daly told Hoh that the EU highly valued the OSCE mission, and believed that replacing its countrywide monitoring function would be difficult, and that closure would be premature.)

¶10. (SBU) Hoh also underscored the broader, regional circumstances of Croatia's role as EU candidate, observing that Croatia wanted to be a model for its neighbors by offering help them to prepare, but the effect of its actions was sometimes to leave them behind. In this context, he inquired about general accession standards for the rest of the region, and whether political considerations will come into play as other countries negotiate their accession. Bendixen argued that EU standards have probably become more stringent now than during previous enlargements. The EU is taking their lessons learned and applying them to current candidates.

¶11. (U) EUR/SEA Doug Silliman and EUR/SCE Chris Hoh have cleared this cable.

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